

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 05164 241308Z
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UNCLAS ISLAMABAD 5164

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ELAB, PK
SUBJECT: UNION-GOP NEGOTIATIONS REACH "ACCORD IN PRINCIPLE" IN
JOURNALISTS STRIKE

REF: A) ISLAMABAD 5099, B) ISLAMABAD 4917

1. SUMMARY -- PRESS REPORTS MAY 24 THAT NEGOTIATORS
REPRESENTING THE PAKISTAN UNION OF JOURNALISTS (PUJ) AND
THE GOVERNMENT HAVE REACHED AN "ACCORD IN PRINCIPLE" IN
THE DISPUTE INVOLVING THE APRIL CLOSURE OF THE LAHORE
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 05164 241308Z

EDITION OF MUSAWAAT. THE PUJ NEGOTIATING TEAM HAS ASKED
THE LAHORE PROTESTERS TO STOP THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS UNTIL
THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE COMPLETED. IN A SEPARATE ACTION
ON MAY 23, NINE ADDITIONAL DEMONSTRATORS WERE SENTENCED
TO JAIL TERMS AND FINES BY A MILITARY COURT FOR THEIR
PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTINUING CONFRONTATION IN LAHORE.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE FIRST MEETING BETWEEN THE PAKISTAN UNION OF JOURNALISTS (PUJ) AND THE GOVERNMENT, DESIGNED TO END THE CONFRONTATION OVER THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION'S (MLA) CLOSURE OF THE LAHORE EDITION OF MUSAWAAT, TOOK PLACE MAY 23 IN RAWALPINDI. PRESS REPORTS MAY 24 INDICATE THAT "AN ACCORD IN PRINCIPLE" HAS BEEN REACHED AND THAT A DETAILED SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM MAY BE FORTHCOMING. THE NEGOTIATORS WILL MEET AGAIN ON MAY 25.

3. THE PUJ TEAM REPORTEDLY ASSURED THE GOP THAT THE UNION BELIEVES IN "RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM." THE PUNJ MAINTAINED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S CLOSURE OF THE LAHORE MUUAWAAT HAD PUT A LARGE NUMBER OF PRESS EMPLOYEES OUT OF WORK AND THAT THIS HAD CAUSED SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP.

4. FOR ITS PART, THE GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATORS REPORTEDLY REAFFIRMED THAT THE MLA HAS "NO INTENTION TO STIFLE POLITICAL DISSENT" AND THAT IT "GENUINELY" FEELS THAT "HEALTHY JOURNALISM IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE NATION." THE MLA FURTHER INDICATED ITS "WILLINGNESS IN PRINCIPLE" TO REOPEN THE PAPER, SO LONG AS THE "MODALITIES AND FRAMEWORK" WERE WORKED OUT TO ENSURE THAT THE PAPER STAYS "WITHIN THE NORMS OF RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM."

5. FOLLOWING THE TALKS, THE PUJ NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE
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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 05164 241308Z

TOOK A FIRST PUBLIC STEP TO DIFFUSE THE CONFRONTATION IN LAHORE BY CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE SUSPENSION OF THE PROTEST CAMPAIGN. THE PUNJ SPOKESMAN SAID THAT SINCE THE GOVERNMENT HAD SHOWN ITS WILLINGNESS TO RESTORE THE NEWSPAPER, AND TO RELEASE OF THOSE DETAINED DURING THE STRIKE, THE UNION SHOULD STRIVE TO CREATE A "CONGENIAL ATMOSPHERE" SO THAT THE TWO SIDES COULD REACH A FINAL AGREEMENT.

6. IN LAHORE, MEANWHILE, A SUMMARY MILITARY COURT SENTENCED FOUR NEWSMEN AND FIVE OTHER PERSONS TO VARIOUS TERMS OF DETENTION (EIGHT RECEIVED BETWEEN THREE AND SIX MONTHS HARD LABOR, ONE SIMPLE IMPRISONMENT) AND FINES. THIS BRINGS THE TOTAL CONVICTED TO NEARLY NINETY. MAY 23 ALSO SAW FOUR ADDITIONAL NEWSMEN ARRESTED AS THEY PREPARED TO GO ON HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST THE MUSAWAAT CLOSURE.
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